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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCES

BY

© ROBERT A. HYNDMAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Research on volunteerism has typically focussed on the organizational context in which it takes place. From this perspective, volunteers are generally seen as the satisfied recipients of a variety of psychic, social, learning, and economic benefits.

The purpose of the study was to understand the meaning ascribed to volunteerism by three active and experienced volunteers. Data gathering was accomplished through multiple open-ended interviews as well as information gathered from various documents provided by the participants.

An analysis of the data reveals that while the participants often found volunteerism enjoyable and beneficial, it also demythologizes the volunteer experience in that it has a "dark side" of abuse and discrimination against volunteers. Nevertheless, on balance, the participants felt positive about their experience of being a volunteer and looked to new opportunities to help others and in the process make new social contacts and acquire new knowledge and skills.

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My deepest thanks to the people who gave me their support, wisdom, and patience: Barbara, my closest friend, and my advisor, Beth. Without their understanding and, especially in Beth's case, active feedback, this writing would never have been completed.

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All of these people gave me a gift - a belief in myself, and a renewed faith in the future.

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CHAPTER I

Overview of the Study

Introduction

Volunteerism spans religious, environmental, human rights, political, artistic, consumer, health, and educational organizations. Statistics Canada (1988) reports that in 1987 more than 25 percent of the Canadian population were volunteers in recognized volunteer organizations. Further, according to Statistics Canada (1988), almost 50 percent of the population were volunteers if volunteerism outside of organizations is taken into account. Similar statistics (Gallup Poll, 1988) are reported from the United States. Volunteerism is not only diverse but apparently a popular pastime as well.

Volunteerism, however, is difficult to define because it has many aspects to it and it is related to particular contexts. Popular stereotypes probably depict volunteerism as any unpaid work that is altruistically motivated. Writers in the volunteer field provide other definitions. Ilsley (1985), for example, defines it in an organizational context as "a balance of the needs of the individual who wishes to volunteer and the needs of the organization" (p. 15). Scheier (1975), in a lengthy conceptual analysis of the term, defines it as "any relatively uncoerced work, intended to help, (and) done without primary or immediate thought of financial

gain" (p. 15). Volunteers (Scheier, 1975) may intend to help others and/or themselves. Other writers attempt to classify different types of volunteer activity. Manser (1981), for example, suggests that volunteer work may include direct service to others, administrative work related to boards and committees, issue and cause advocacy, citizen participation, as well as participation in self-help groups. While it is apparent that there is no commonly agreed upon definition or classification system, volunteerism is seen as encompassing an increasingly broad segment of human activity.

According to some writers (Langton, 1982), a "renaissance of interest in volunteerism" (p. 1) is occurring. This study symbolizes my renewed interest in volunteerism stemming from my own experience of being a volunteer.

Purpose of the Study

It was my hunch from the outset of this study that there is little known about volunteerism from the perspective of the volunteers themselves. My literature search seemed to corroborate my own observations. While there was a voluminous literature on some aspects of volunteerism, there was comparatively little written about what volunteers do or what they might think about those experiences. This study, then, is an attempt to provide a "voice" for volunteers to describe their volunteer experiences.

Questions Related to the Study

In this study, I explore the question: How do selected volunteers describe the experience of doing volunteer work?

Assumption of the Study

Participants will be able to recall and discuss their experiences and the benefits of being a volunteer.

Scope of the Study

This study is based on a series of in-depth interviews with three active and experienced volunteers and my reflections on their stories.

Definitions

The following definitions are provided for terms that will appear often in the study.

1) **volunteerism** - "any relatively uncoerced work, intended to help, (and) done without primary or immediate thought of financial gain" (Scheier, 1975, p. 15).

2) **experience** - "the conscious events that make up an individual life; something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary).

3) **benefit** - "anything that is advantageous or for the good of a person" (Ibid).

4) **learning** - "the way in which individuals acquire, interpret, reorganize, change, or assimilate a related cluster of information, skills, and feelings" (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 4).

Need for the Study

There are numerous individuals and groups who might gain by learning more about what volunteers have to say about their experience of doing volunteer work. People considering doing or continuing with volunteer work may be interested in the experiences of other volunteers. In organizations that rely on volunteers, volunteer coordinators may want to know more about what volunteers like and/or dislike about doing volunteer work so they can plan more effective recruitment campaigns and more meaningful volunteer jobs. Adult educators may want to assist in planning for more effective training programs in volunteer organizations. Community and political leaders may have an interest in acquiring insights into volunteers so that policy may be developed related to volunteerism and the provision of health, education, and social services.

Some observers (Scheier, 1975) view volunteerism as the single best hope for an uncertain world. It is seen as a way of making government and the private

sector more responsive to the needs of individuals and their communities. It makes sense, in my opinion, to learn more about being a volunteer.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Related Literature

I organize this literature review into three sections. In the first section, I provide a brief overview of the literature on volunteerism. In the second section, I review those aspects of the literature that present volunteerism as a beneficial experience. To conclude the chapter, I review the literature that provides a critical perspective on volunteerism.

Overview of the Literature

While the volunteer literature is substantial, there is comparatively little written from the perspective of volunteers themselves. Much of the literature is written by and for government and voluntary sector leaders. It is clear that these groups have a strong interest in supporting volunteer organizations. Statistics Canada (1988), for example, says that volunteerism "needs the support of individual Canadians as well as all levels of government because it is such an important area of human activity" (p. 3). A common theme throughout the literature is the positive impacts of volunteerism. Alberta Career and Employment (1988), for instance, says that "volunteering is a positive experience for all those involved" (p. 60).

It is generally assumed by government that volunteers make a valuable contribution to society. Volunteer activity is not only the "social glue" (Statistics Canada, 1988, p. 6) that keeps Canadian society together but it is a significant economic activity as well. Volunteers directly contribute to the economy by spending money to meet out-of-pocket expenses while, at the same time, providing service to the community at little cost.

On the other side of the volunteer transaction, volunteerism may provide the volunteer with assorted benefits. Statistics Canada (1988) describes these in a general way as opportunities to "demonstrate talents, ambitions, and concerns in ways that are different from regular daily responsibilities" (p. 6).

A second major area in the literature presents volunteerism from the perspective of volunteer leaders. Recurring topics include issues related to organizational development, as well as practical ideas and tips on volunteer recruitment, training, and evaluation. This literature offers a wealth of technical know-how on how to manage the successful volunteer organization. Implicit is the assumption that volunteer organizations have much to offer their volunteers.

More recently, adult and career development educators have taken an interest in volunteerism. Conceptual and research-based literature exists indicating

that volunteer activity is a source of learning and further, it can be used as a tool for finding employment and career development.

Positive Impacts

It is apparent that the literature portrays the volunteer experience in an almost entirely positive way. Volunteers, depending upon their interests and motivation, can expect to receive psychic and social benefits, acquire knowledge and skills, and/or longer term economic benefits. I now turn to a discussion of these different benefits as described in the literature.

Psychological and Social Benefits

Writers in the volunteer field often allude to the interrelated psychological and social benefits of doing volunteer work. The psychological benefits are generally seen as related to some form of "helping relationship" while the social rewards of volunteerism are often associated with meeting other volunteers, staff, and/or clients in a particular organization.

Research indicates that volunteers are a satisfied group. Statistics Canada (1988), for example, says that more than 90 percent of the more than 70,000 volunteers surveyed report being "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with their volunteerism. This research, however, provides no specific information on what aspects of volunteer activity volunteers find satisfying.

Other writers offer personal observations on the psychological benefits of volunteerism. Graff (1991) says these are "simply the good feelings that one experiences from helping others - from doing good work" (p. 11). Thero (1989) maintains that "volunteering can offer the sense of doing something worthwhile, spending time well" (p. 5). Pinder (1985) argues that volunteer activity can meet a variety of human psychic needs, including self-esteem, competence, achievement, power, and self-actualization.

Other literature focuses on the social aspects of volunteer activity. Volunteer activity is seen as a way to meet human social needs, including needs for intimacy, affiliation, and recognition. Statistics Canada (1988) says that almost three-quarters of the volunteers in their study view "meeting people and finding companionship" as "important considerations" in doing volunteer work" (p. 14).

Other writers in the volunteer field offer insights into the social benefits of volunteer work. Wilson (1990) maintains that volunteerism can meet the social needs of people who are experiencing difficult life transitions such as "loss of loved one, moving to a new community, loss of a job, or divorce" (p. 33). Further, she says, volunteers can develop "marvelous relationships with other volunteers" (p. 7) while working for a volunteer cause. Smith (1973) maintains that volunteer activity can provide " . . . all manner of recreation in an otherwise boring or at least psychically fatiguing world" (p. 334). In my opinion, this observation, made in the

mid-1970s, may perhaps be even more true in the recession-torn and anxiety-producing workplace of the 1990s.

Learning Benefits

Some writers in the volunteer field see volunteerism in terms of adult learning. Learning in this context is defined in a broad range of ways from knowledge and skill acquisition (Whitmore, Sappington, Compton, Green, 1988), to personal growth and development (Smith, 1973), to learning from critical reflection (Ilsley, 1990).

Volunteer managers generally view volunteer learning as knowledge and skill acquisition in the context of training programs. In this educational arrangement (Macduff, 1988), "the adult volunteer is the learner and the volunteer program manager is the teacher" (p. 38). Volunteers are seen as motivated learners (Naylor, 1976) "who want to learn how to carry the assignments which they have been given as volunteers" (p. 107).

Most volunteer managers recommend a continuous teaching and learning process for volunteers. Renton (1986) describes volunteer training and learning as "accomplished in stages through introduction to the job, orientation to the agency, and training for specific jobs" (p. 30). Each of these components builds on a preceding one and at the same time is thought to be a learning experience in itself. For example, the volunteer learns about the philosophy, goals, policies,

programs, and clients through the orientation segment of the training program and this learning sets the stage for the specific job training which comes next.

Little research, however, has been conducted on what volunteer training programs exist in practice. One observer (Rossing, 1988) suggests that volunteer training probably varies widely in terms of quantity and quality from one setting to another.

Other literature focuses on the entire range of learning from volunteer activity. Rossing (1988) suggests that the learning acquired by volunteers through their volunteer work is "an enormously underused social resource" and that "there is much more learning going on in volunteer organizations than is generally recognized or appreciated" (p. 46). Grantham (1979) says that volunteer activity offers a social context which is conducive to adult learning in that the autonomy and prior experience of the adult volunteer is taken into account. She adds, perhaps overoptimistically, that volunteer activity is indicative of people's ability to critically evaluate "the meaning of their lives, their relationships with their fellow human beings, and conditions around them" (p. 211). Elsey (1982), a British adult educator, maintains that volunteer organizations offer an "already existing form of informal adult education" and "they attract adults from diverse economic and educational backgrounds" (p. 391). While this may be true in Great Britain, it

appears that volunteer organizations in Canada and the United States mainly attract people from groups with higher levels of income and education.

Various research projects have documented different aspects of volunteer learning. This research-based literature is limited and seems mainly concerned with the quantity and sometimes the quality of learning acquired in volunteer settings. These studies focus on the learning done by volunteers generally and the learning linked to particular volunteer organizations.

Statistics Canada (1988), based on their survey of volunteers across different settings, says that two-thirds of volunteers "consider learning new skills an important aspect of their volunteer work" (p. 14). Further, volunteers may acquire learning in six general areas, including interpersonal, communication, managerial, fund-raising, and technical skills as well as substantive knowledge related to special topics and issues. Statistics Canada (1988) concluded most volunteers learn interpersonal skills, while the least number learn about special topics and issues.

Ilsley (1990), in a four-year study involving over 180 volunteers in 34 different organizations, provides insight into volunteer learning. Three different purposes for volunteer learning are identified. These are instrumental/didactic learning (skill training linked to organizational goals), social/expressive learning (interpersonal and communication knowledge and skills), and critical reflection

(becoming aware of one's perspectives in relation to societal politics and values). Ilsley suggests that all three kinds of learning "can and do occur in almost any volunteer setting" and that volunteerism can provide a "wide selection of learning opportunities from which adults may choose" (p. 123).

Other research (Whitmore et al., 1988) focuses on the learning acquired by volunteers in rural community-based organizations. Ten volunteers in organzations ranging from social action movements (for example, an environmental action group) to leisure services (for example, a senior citizens group) were interviewed about what they learned as a result of participating in a particular group. A learning typology which addresses significant learning dimensions is presented. Volunteers may learn about themselves (for example, personal abilities and limitations) and/or learn about others (for example, learning about reasonable expectations of others), learn about internal group dynamics and/or learn about external factors affecting group functioning, as well as learn knowledge and/or skills. The findings suggest that volunteers who participate in groups seeking social change acquire the broadest learning across the three learning dimensions. The most common learning category for the volunteers was learning about the internal dynamics of groups followed by learning about a group's external context and learning about self. The research concluded that "the quantity and quality of

learning in rural community groups is an enormously rich and underutilized resource in our society" (p. 67).

Another research study (Fiset, Freeman, Ilsley, Snow, 1987) focuses on the type, content, and method of learning in four different types of volunteer organizations. These volunteer organizations are institutionally directed (for example, hospital volunteer program), volunteer group directed (for example, self-help groups), problem directed (for example, volunteer boards) and social change directed organizations (for example, civil rights movement). A framework is offered for comparing the learning that is characteristic of each type of volunteer organization. Institutionally directed organizations emphasize instrumental/didactic learning while volunteer group directed organizations place a premium on social/expressive learning. Learning problem-solving skills is most important in problem-directed organizations and learning in the critical reflexive mode mainly occurs in social change directed organizations. The study concluded that different volunteer contexts influence the type of learning acquired by volunteers.

Economic Benefits

There is growing interest by government and career counsellors in the links between volunteerism and employment and career development. The literature describes two aspects of this link. Volunteers can develop networks that may

provide contacts and information about jobs and also acquire experience, skills, and knowledge that may be directly transferred to paid employment.

Various writers have described the informal nature of the job market. Stephan (1991), for example, suggests that it is critical for people to make contacts and create networks if they are to be successful in finding employment. Alberta Career Development and Employment (1989) says that volunteerism provides many opportunities for people to create networks that are invaluable for finding a paid job.

Other writers have focussed on the learning acquired by volunteers and its application to the workplace. Generally, the skills and knowledge acquired through volunteerism are seen as directly transferable to paid jobs.

Loeser (1978) describes a volunteer "internship program," which was specifically designed to assist women who had been out of the paid workforce for an extended period of time, to find paid employment. Of the 35 women who participated in the case study, "all but six are presently settled in new lines of endeavour . . . the majority are working in paid jobs" (p. 15). Such specialized volunteer programs can be highly successful for women in terms of finding jobs and career development and the study recommends that such volunteer programs be created for unemployed men as well. The study, however, does not specify

whether it was networking or the newly-acquired experience and skills, or both, that was a critical factor in finding a paid job.

Other studies focus more directly on volunteer learning and paid jobs. Schram (1985), using a sample of 351 university graduates who had done different volunteer jobs, found that 335 of the participants had developed skills through their volunteer work and 281 of them indicated they were using those skills in their paid employment. Schram (1985) says that "it seems reasonable to assume that any volunteer job has the potential to allow a volunteer to develop job-related skills" (p. 29).

Janey, Tuckwiller, and Lonnquist (1991) surveyed 270 individuals who reported using the knowledge and skills they had acquired through volunteerism in a variety of settings to find paid employment or become self-employed. The findings were that "management, leadership, communications, and human relations knowledge and skills" were most transferable to paid employment and the study suggests that "volunteer organizations can be useful laboratories for developing knowledge and skills" (p. 78).

Negative Impacts

While the literature generally emphasizes the positive impact of volunteerism on the volunteer, it would be pointing out the obvious to suggest that not all

volunteers are satisfied or obtain benefits. This contention is substantiated in the research. Statistics Canada (1988), for example, says that almost 20 percent of the volunteers in their survey report some or much dissatisfaction. While this study does not explain why volunteers may be dissatisfied, other writers suggest that volunteer jobs, organizational structure and practices, as well as discrimination may negatively impact some volunteers.

According to some writers, volunteers may find some volunteer work unchallenging and boring. A survey in the United States (Gallup, 1988, p. 31) found that lack of interest ("not interested in what I was asked to do; not interested in the work; just didn't want to do it") was the second most common reason (18 percent) given by people who discontinued their volunteer work. These responses indicate that some volunteers were indifferent or even disliked their volunteer assignments. Allen (1980) says that "volunteers too often drift away from jobs they find frustrating and meaningless" (p. 33). He suggests that volunteer coordinators must find more challenging volunteer jobs if they expect to be able to keep volunteers. Ilsley (1990) found that volunteers who mainly acquire instrumental learning (skill training) rapidly lose interest in their volunteer jobs. His finding is supported by Fiset et al. (1987) who found that institution-directed organizations that emphasized instrumental/didactic learning for volunteers could expect the least commitment in terms of duration of service (less than three years) from their

volunteers. It is common knowledge that many volunteer jobs require minimal skills (for example, taking tickets or stuffing envelopes), and it is reasonable to suggest that some volunteers would find these monotonous and deadening.

Organizational structure and practice may be critical factors influencing the volunteer experience. Volunteers (perhaps like their paid counterparts) may dislike working in organizations with highly-structured bureaucracies. Stupak (1986) maintains that many employees, clients, and volunteers find such organizations "frustrating, alienating, and discriminating" (p. 1). He says that organizations "which attempt to operate without a traditional hierarchy (i.e. nontraditional organizations)" offer volunteers a "productive, holistic experience" (p. 7). By the same manner, Ilsley (1990) says that many volunteer-based organizations have adopted a "workplace model" and as a result volunteers may be excluded from the organization decision-making process and face arbitrary rules and procedures established by staff and management. When this occurs, volunteers can experience "dissatisfaction, burnout, and resignation" (p. 125). Ilsley advocates improved volunteer leadership, increased volunteer participation, and increased volunteer learning as an antidote to volunteer dissatisfaction.

Volunteer activity is seen by some feminist writers as having a negative impact on women. While the statistics show that the gender imbalance is correcting itself as more men volunteer, Baty (1989) argues that a gender

imbalance exists within the volunteer community. "Women still predominate in teaching, health care, and domestic functions (i.e., the endless bake sale syndrome)" (p. 5), while men assume mainly managerial and organizational roles. According to Baty (1989), the solution rests with women being more assertive in assuming responsible volunteer jobs in the equal opportunity volunteer job market. It is more likely, however, that women are conditioned to assume particular volunteer jobs while, at the same time, are excluded from more responsible ones.

Adams (circa. 1965) argues that volunteer work conditions women to willingly accept their role as helpers and marginal wage earners in a capitalist economy. She says that volunteer work is "pseudo-work" in that no income is forthcoming and the work generally focuses more on the self-therapy and self-satisfaction of the woman volunteer and not on any productive job that needs to be accomplished. While her views may be dated in terms of women's marginal role in the economy, women still form the majority of the volunteer community. Further, it is likely that women assume fewer responsible positions than men in volunteer organizations. In summary, volunteerism may be seen as an activity that disengages women, often joyfully, from their own true self-actualization.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature related to volunteer activity. To summarize, while the literature on volunteerism is considerable, little of it presents volunteer activity from the perspective of the people who actually do it; the volunteers. As a result, I suggest that much of the volunteer literature is prescriptive in that volunteering is seen as it "should be" and perhaps not "as it is lived." In my opinion, the claims by government and voluntary sector leaders of the benefits of volunteer activity are excessive. This literature is biased and designed to support the efforts of volunteer managers.

Research studies related to the benefits of volunteer learning are limited. While they show that volunteer activity may be linked to adult learning, the studies do not demonstrate the quality of learning acquired by volunteers. Similarly, links between volunteerism and employment are tentative. While volunteers may indeed acquire experience and skills, there is no conclusive evidence to support the contention that these actually help people get jobs.

Critical perspectives on volunteer activity are difficult to find. This is no doubt partly the result of the deep cultural and religious tradition of volunteerism in our society. The literature is full of platitudes on the virtues of volunteers. As a result, volunteerism is seen as mainly an apolitical activity in that it is only

remotely linked to systems of power. This is a strongly-held myth and will change slowly, if at all. Volunteerism, like education, (Freire, 1970), is inherently political in that it serves the interests of some people more than others.

CHAPTER III

Research Approach and Procedures

In this chapter, I describe my research approach and procedures under the following headings: Research Approach, Pilot Study, Participant Selection, Data Sources, Interviews, Data Trustworthiness, and Data Analysis. I also provide a brief sketch of each participant's volunteer career.

Research Approach

My objective in this study was to understand from the perspective of individual participants a complex set of interrelated experiences. It was obvious to me that statistical studies of these phenomena, such as demographic profiles, would not enable me to gain insight into how the participants made meaning of their volunteer activities. For these reasons, a qualitative/interpretative research approach was appropriate for this study.

This study employed a case study approach using interviews as the principle method of data collection. Case studies are recommended in situations where the researcher wants to generate detailed data (Patton, 1988) about something that has been little documented. The purpose in using a case study approach was to develop some tentative conclusions related to the study's research question so that more specific questions might be generated for future

research projects. I make no attempt to generalize from this research as to the experiences of other volunteers.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study to determine the usefulness of a set of interview questions that I had developed as part of the study's proposal. I wanted to gain some practical experience doing interviews in addition to gaining a sense of how much time the data gathering process might take. In the end, the pilot study took place over a two-week period and included an orientation meeting, interview, and follow-up discussion. Each of these sessions lasted between an hour and an hour and a half.

I chose a friend for the pilot study; someone who was an active and experienced volunteer. Through my initial contact with her, she indicated an interest in my research topic and expressed enthusiasm about being interviewed about her volunteer activities. I hoped that my longstanding friendship with her might serve to increase comfort levels at an initial interview by a novice researcher.

The pilot study raised an important issue related to the structured interview schedule that I had developed from the literature. Before I was halfway through the pilot interview, I sensed that the interview schedule imposed a structure on the

interviewee which restricted her spontaneity in talking about her volunteer activities. A related problem was my perceived need to cover all the questions in the schedule, which I believe added to the frustration of the participant.

I discussed this matter with my advisor and in subsequent interviews decided to use unstructured interviews. I developed a general topic for each interview, such as meeting people or volunteer learning, based upon the literature or previous interview data and one or two related questions to get each interview started. (See Appendix C). Nevertheless, I found some of the data from the pilot study useful and with the permission of the interviewee decided to use it in the study.

I began data analysis immediately after the pilot interview. I was able to construct a chronology of the participant's volunteer career and from it identify key ideas. These included meeting people, finding companions, enjoyment and fun, coercion, personal growth, learning about others, and learning about an organization. Some important ideas, such as meeting people and finding companions were obvious, while others, such as learning about the history of an organization, were less apparent.

Participant Selection

I initially planned on inviting six participants who worked in different settings to participate in the study, but due to time restrictions and availability of participants, I eventually decided to limit the number to three and spend more time with each of them.

The main criterion for selection of participants was that they were active volunteers with long volunteer careers of more than fifteen years. The first participant was the interviewee in the pilot study, and as I indicated, she had been a volunteer for many years. The second participant was identified by an administrator at a volunteer referral agency. She came recommended by the administrator as someone with much experience and knowledge about volunteer activity. My initial contact with her confirmed that she had much volunteer experience. The third participant identified himself through his volunteer work at the university. He was the volunteer representative of a student association and had also been active over the years in community organizations.

The participants indicated during the preliminary discussions that they considered volunteer activity an important aspect of their lives. In addition, each participant expressed an interest in the research topic and expressed enthusiasm about being interviewed about their volunteerism. I considered their positive

attitude toward the research project a good sign because I believed it would help me explore their volunteer experiences.

Data Sources

A series of unstructured interviews, together with various documents, were the main sources of data for the study. I conducted four approximately one-hour interviews with each of the participants over a two-month period. I tape recorded all of the interviews. I also used information sheets (see appendix A) to gather background data about each participant and resumes, which were provided by two of the participants. In addition, I used some brochures and leaflets which I collected on organizations in which each participant had been involved. The local newspapers ran a series of articles related to volunteer work which were helpful. A conference in Edmonton in the fall of 1991 entitled "The New Age of Volunteerism" proved too costly to attend but I did manage to collect some of the written material form it.

Interviews

After the participants had accepted my formal invitations to participate in the study, I met with individual participants for an orientation session to further elaborate on the nature and purpose of the research. I also used this meeting to

review with the participants the ethical guidelines on research as formulated by the university. I explained to the participants that their identity would remain confidential through the course of the study and that they could opt out of the study at any time. I also explained to the participants that they would have an opportunity to review the transcribed interviews and give feedback on them. At the conclusion of the orientation session, I asked individual participants to read and sign a consent form for the research (see appendix B).

I met with individual participants at a mutually convenient time in their home or office. I attempted in the first interview to gain an overall sense of their volunteer career and used subsequent interviews to focus on key ideas as perceived by each participant and also gaps in the data as I perceived them. As the interviews progressed, I developed an open relationship with the participants. This contributed to the study, I believe, in that it allowed me greater opportunity to understand volunteerism as experienced by them.

Data Trustworthiness

In order to ensure the credibility of the data, I transcribed each interview verbatim and then provided the participants with a copy of their interview. During the follow-up sessions, I asked each participant to confirm the accuracy of the transcription as well as to clarify ideas and themes that were emerging from the

data. I kept notes of these meetings in my journal. In addition, I provided the participants with my sketch of their volunteer careers and asked for feedback as to their accuracy. My interpretation of the data was sometimes confirmed through these meetings I had with each participant.

I also discussed my perceptions of the study as it progressed with my advisor and an assortment of other people including my colleagues at work. I kept notes of these meetings as well. I purposively sought out people who had done formal volunteering in a variety of settings and was alert to whether they could relate to the emerging themes. Several people could relate to the psychological, social and/or learning benefits related to volunteering. One colleague was interested in the abuse of volunteers because that was partly his experience in a particular organization.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was a process that began with each interview. I got into the habit of listening to each tape three or four times before I transcribed it. In this way, I gained an overall sense of what the participant had said in the interview. At this early stage, my data analysis mainly consisted of underlining key words and phrases in the transcripts and starting a master code of these in my journal. I also found that constructing charts and time lines was a useful aid to conceptualizing

the main ideas in each participants volunteer career. These were particularly helpful for writing the volunteer biographies at the end of this chapter.

As the code list evolved (eventually numbering over sixty key ideas), I was alert to common experiences among the participants, and these formed the emerging themes of the study. I used a grounded theory approach (Glasser and Strauss, 1967) to validate each theme with the participants. For example, "coercion" was a key idea as described by one participant while "shoddy treatment" and "saying no" were codes from the other participants. These codes evolved into a category of "abusing volunteers."

Volunteer Careers

Alberta Career Development and Employment (1988) defines a career as "the course one takes as one progresses through life" (p. 5). In the context of the study, I will use the term to refer to participant's personal history of volunteerism. In this section I provide brief sketches of each participant's volunteer career.

Emma: Emma is forty years old and single. She has worked as a customer service representative for a major airline for almost twenty years. She described her job as providing financial security and also enjoyable because of the opportunities to meet a variety of people. At the time of the interviews she had just completed , through part-time study, an arts degree at the university. She saw this

as mainly a self-improvement project (she initially left high school before graduation) but she also thinks about a new career, possibly teaching English as a Second Language.

Emma sees her upbringing as "strict." She was raised in a religious family in rural Manitoba and described being "coerced" into attending church as well as different youth groups in the community. She said that she left home at an early age and found work.

Emma described her first "real" volunteer activity as donating blood at the Red Cross. She has donated more than a hundred times and, at the time of the interviews, had just completed an interview with the Red Cross plasmapheresis unit. If accepted, she will be able to donate each month instead of every three months. Emma said that being a blood donor meant little in the beginning, but she now sees it as "the first time I ever looked beyond myself."

Emma discovered alcohol at age thirteen, and by the time she reached her late teens, it had assumed a position of central importance in her life. She described it in the end as nearly taking her life.

> It [alcohol] gave me courage - it gave me a social life that I wasn't willing to go out after without drinking. It made me feel "a part of" because I felt so insecure without alcohol. I mean, that was it - everything in my life revolved around alcohol.

Emma described joining a self-help group as a way of recovering from alcoholism as a major life decision. She tried psychiatrists, psychologists, and various other "cures" but none of these worked for her. Emma described helping others as a way of stopping drinking and becoming a "better person."

Over the past few years she has joined numerous other personal development groups and has done more traditional volunteer work with a distress center and an English as a Second Language program. At the time of the interviews, she had just accepted a volunteer position as the representative for her company's employee assistance program. Emma described her different volunteer activities as part of her ongoing "recovery and spiritual journey."

Through the study, I came to think of Emma as the "spiritual volunteer." Her main goal is personal and spiritual growth through helping others in different volunteer organizations.

Susan: Susan is in her mid-thirties, single, and works as the public relations director of a volunteer referral agency. Before that, she worked in the private sector in computer and travel sales. Although she described liking her job in the nonprofit sector, she also said the pay is low. She plans to return someday to the private sector or find a better-paying job as executive director of a nonprofit organization. She also thinks about returning to university to complete her

Bachelor of Arts degree and perhaps going on to complete a Masters in Business Administration.

Susan described a long history of volunteer activity. She was raised by her mother and grandmother and said these people were "busy individuals always involved in the community or some sort of volunteer work." Susan told some humorous stories about her mother's efforts at trying to keep her busy and away from the family television set when she was younger. She described being "busy all the time" and belonging to different community groups, such as the Girl Guides, and volunteering to make life more pleasant for other people. She volunteered with a friend when she was thirteen to help out the Boy Scouts at a summer camp. She reflected on the major responsibilities she assumed as a young volunteer.

> . . . it just blows me away to think that the movement thought that two thirteen-year-olds could cook for sixty people. But we did and we never really thought much about it. We really had a good time and we obviously did a good job. None of the kids got ptomaine poisoning or anything.

Susan continued with volunteer work in high school which she described as a place where "thirty students do the work for 700." She was on student's council, the school newspaper, the grad committee, as well as a number of other student bodies.

Susan described becoming involved in volunteer board work when she left university. She said that at the time, she was "burned out" working with children because she had helped raise her adopted niece. However, she wanted to stay involved with children's issues so she joined a nonprofit daycare board. She described that as an ideal choice because she could stay involved but "at arm's length."

It was also during this period of her life that she was denied an important promotion with her sales job. This was to catapult her into an even more far-ranging volunteer career.

> I was working for a computer company for eight-and-a-half years. I was working twelve or thirteen hours a day for a promotion, and I was hardly doing any volunteer work at that time. They decided to hire from the outside, and I was just devastated. I really realized that I had all my eggs in one basket, and I was never going to do that again.

At the time of the interviews, Susan juggled a broad array of volunteer activities. She was on the boards of an AIDS organization, arts organization, environmental organization, as well as a social planning council. In addition, she was a facilitator with a family education association and chaired a women's group. Each summer she volunteers for a number of city festivals. She has just completed her training to become a community mediations officer. During peak

periods, she described spending more than thirty hours each week doing different volunteer jobs. It is not uncommon, she said, to attend board meetings at 5:00, 7:30, and 9:00 in the same evening.

I saw Susan as the "career volunteer" because she devotes as much time and energy to volunteerism as many people might expend on finding a job or career development. Volunteerism, for Susan, is a central focus in her life.

John: John is in his early thirties, married, and has two children. At the time of the interviews, he was completing his undergraduate degree which he started in the early 1970s. John is a carpenter and has also worked in the property development industry. He described owning his own residential and commercial contracting business but said that he sold it to return to university.

John traced his volunteer activity to his rural roots in Saskatchewan. He described his family members as heavily involved in community affairs as well as local and provincial politics. He joined the youth wing of the Saskatchewan Conservative Party and put up posters and handed out leaflets in his father's campaign to win a seat in the legislature. Family dinners were like "political forums" in which he learned much about the political process. He described learning at an early age to distrust powerful governments and to support individuals and groups with little power. John maintained his link with the

Conservatives until 1988, when he decided to leave the party because "they really didn't care about people anymore."

Although John has done ad hoc volunteer work in his neighbourhood and at his children's school, he described the focus of his adult volunteer career as the different leadership positions he has assumed with the Edmonton chapter of a national fundraising organization. He has been the fundraising chairman, vice president, president-elect, and past president of the organization. He described this volunteer activity as "the equivalent of nearly a full-time job" and he regularly put in thirty hours each week. He was also elected by the membership to the club's national federation and served as president of that organization. He said that he could never have done the volunteer work had it not been for his successful business ventures.

John sees volunteer work as a meaningful way to make a contribution to society. He thinks deeply and critically about volunteerism and its impact on society. Because of that, I thought of John as the "reflective volunteer."

Summary

In this chapter, I described my research approach and procedures. In order to explore the research question that I posed in Chapter One, I chose a qualitative/interpretive approach. I used interviews as the principle method of data

collection and limited that participants to three in order to achieve greater depth in data collection. The purpose of this approach was to develop some tentative conclusions from which questions might be generated for future research projects. I described the data analysis as ongoing throughout the research project. In addition, I described the participant selection process, interview process, and measures that I adopted to ensure credibility of the data.

I concluded the chapter by briefly introducing each participant. In the next chapter, I describe the findings of the study.

CHAPTER IV

Description of the Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings of the study from the perspective of five categories. These are "Finding and Losing Commitment," "Meeting People and Networking," "Finding Companions," "Abusing Volunteers," and "Learning through Volunteerism." I include extensive quotations from the data in order to give a "voice" to the participants.

Finding and Losing Commitment

Webster's New Collegiate dictionary defines a commitment as a "dedication or obligation to a particular cause or action." According to Ilsley (1990), a well-known writer in the volunteer field, "voluntary action is inconceivable without commitment" (p. 33).

The participants in this study described commitments with varying levels of intensity to different entities. Emma, for instance, made commitments to different people and client groups. Susan described volunteer commitment mainly in terms of loyalty to a particular organization, while John expressed a vision of a more humane and compassionate society. I now turn to a discussion of some of the commitments made by this study's participants.

Emma described a strong commitment to immigrant students in a large, institutionally-based, English as a Second Language program. She works as a tutor and classroom aide and said that she spends between five and ten hours each week at her volunteer teaching. She sees her commitment as linked to an interest in people from different cultures. She has travelled extensively and lived in foreign countries with her airline job and has also experienced firsthand some of the problems associated with not being able to speak a foreign language.

More recently, she has decided to travel less but said that English as a Second Language is ideal in that "you can meet people from all over the world without ever having to leave the country." Based on her own experience, she described a variety of problems faced by English as a Second Language learners who immigrate to Canada.

> I can't even imagine what these people's experiences must be coming to this country and not knowing the language. And as far as I'm concerned, you can't do anything here without the language . . . [and] that is not the only problem - there is all kinds of racism and discrimination right here in Edmonton. It's fine for me to visit all these countries and have the same experiences, but it is just temporary. I'm out of there and back home, but for them this is it . . . I just think that I have something to offer [these people] in that area.

Emma felt strong emotional links with her learners. She was "frustrated and disappointed" when one of her students, who was doing well, got pregnant and decided to drop her education. On another occasion, she shared the joy in a class when one of her students found a job. "I was really happy for him and I think (he) gave hope to the others." Ending a class was sometimes difficult.

> I was getting really involved with them. I really got to know them over five weeks. I was starting to learn things about them - like one of the guys from El Salvador came to class with their little girl because they couldn't find a babysitter . . . I just wondered about what was going to happen to them. I felt kind of "cut off" and sad that I would probably never see them again. I had to harden up after that. I thought, "I can't be going through this all the time."

Emma's volunteer work, however, has not been entirely altruistic. She thinks about a career in English as a Second Language and said that "the reason why it was important to continue with that experience was I wanted to learn how to teach." She described acquiring knowledge and skills related to teaching students how to read.

Further, through interaction with the instructors and other classroom aides, she has learned about community-based programs where both volunteers and learners have greater control over the learning process. Emma adopted a new perspective on English as a Second Language as a participatory learning process.

> In the beginning, I was looking for something more structured and it appealed to me to be in a classroom with a teacher rather than being on my own. Now I know I can be more creative. I can actually teach classes at a [community program] and the students have more of a say in things [as well].

Emma described a different commitment to a client group at a distress center. She wanted some firsthand experience working with people in crisis situations because she had thoughts about a career in social work. Volunteer experience is a prerequisite for admission into a university social work program and she added that, at the time, she was growing tired of "twelfth-step work" (working with other alcoholics in self-help groups).

She learned about the volunteer job through the newspaper and from contacts in her self-help groups who had volunteered there. She made a one-year commitment to telephone crisis counselling and the clients, whom she described as ranging from "someone who was bored at night to other people who were really serious suicide threats."

Emma began her volunteer assignment with a strong sense of commitment. The training she received was "interesting" because "they brought in speakers on a whole range of topics." She received training on crisis counselling and learned about people with emotional problems and some of the services in the community

that could help them. She soon discovered, however, that the volunteer assignment was not to her liking.

> It was boring. I was expecting a more exciting experience than I had. I learned that I didn't have the patience for it - for the kind of listening skills that you needed to have there . . . and you are really limited [in terms of helping people] over the telephone . . . I think I got an understanding of how difficult it is to help people who don't particularly want help. I just found that frustrating - especially the people who would phone there five or ten times a day . . . I couldn't understand why these people weren't doing more for themselves when I thought they could.

Emma completed her one-year commitment to the distress center and then left the organization. It was, nevertheless, a valuable learning experience.

> I wasn't sure what area [career] I wanted to go into, but after the distress center, I was sure I didn't want to go into social work. It just solved that whole issue for me - I had no desire to do anything in social work at all.

Susan has deep concerns about the AIDS crisis. She said it was the "most serious health crisis in human history." She lost friends to the disease and was especially worried about its potential impact on the younger generation. "It would only take one student in a high school with HIV to start the ball rolling."

Susan made a strong commitment to an AIDS prevention organization. She learned about the organization through her network and, at the time of the interviews, had been a board member for almost three years. Susan described the organization as a "grass-roots" organization which was started in someone's living room "by people who really cared about the AIDS issue." The mandate of the organization is mainly AIDS education in the Edmonton area.

At an early meeting, Susan was elected in absentia to chair the human resources committee of the board. She approved of this decision because she likes the people on the board, whom she described as "social workers and other people who are not in my regular circle of friends." She also likes the interesting and challenging volunteer job. While it was the AIDS cause that initially attracted her, it has been the democratic and interactive nature of the organization that has heightened her sense of commitment.

> . . . it [the AIDS organization] is the opportunity to be in a situation and learn things and to try out new things . . . The work of the board is so interesting because everybody on the board is on a committee. There are five or six committees and that is where the actual work gets done . . . We grappled with the personnel policy and we did a benefits analysis to be certain that our people were getting the same as in other nonprofits. I was on the hiring committee for one of our coordinators because the executive director didn't want to do it . . . The board is very much involved in a hands-on way, and the decisions are very much at a committee level.

Volunteer work with the AIDS organization for Susan has been more meaningful than many of her paid jobs which she sees as lacking in creativity and opportunities to learn and advance in a particular organizational structure.

> In my normal job I would never get a chance to do the things that I get to do with the AIDS organization. When I'm at my paid job the phone rings, and it is all demand time. [Or] I get a piece of paper. Does this piece of paper go in the garbage? Should I pass it along? Does it go in the file? Is this really doing the world any good? I have more of a sense of doing "good work" in volunteering - paid work is not like that.

Susan planned on continuing her work with the AIDS organization. She described her commitment to the organization as the closest she has come to a total volunteer commitment.

Susan has also done volunteer work with little sense of commitment. She applied for a board position with a high profile cultural organization on the advice of a friend who said she would meet "influential people in the community." She was hoping to enjoy some "status and prestige" as well as opportunities to network but instead described feeling "stifled" by bureaucratic structure and practice.

> . . . there is one president and one past president and there are eight or nine vice presidents. The vice presidents all head up committees that are verticalized. A vice president of special projects might have six people under him, and another vice president might have only

> two volunteers under him. When you join the board, you have one year to try it out, and they have one year to try you out. If you pass, then you are on the board for three years . . . You sign a pledge card up front saying how much money you are going to donate and how many bingos you are willing to do. [It is] how much of this and how much of that . . . then what they do is take the pledge and each board member fills out an evaluation form and then you report to your vice president and he evaluates you based on these documents, and he decides who stays and who goes . . . it is all really political and long-winded.

Susan saw many of the actions of the male-dominated hierarchy as discriminatory and abusive. I will elaborate further on these in the section on "Abusing Volunteers."

Susan was appointed to the "special events and casino committee"; a job that involved being a "committee of one." This further frustrated and alienated her because she has always preferred working with others.

> I don't like to be the one who has to do everything. I like to have a group of people who are all working together. With the arts organization I had to do all the forms and deal with all the casino staff. It probably took about 100 hours and it was all jammed into one month. I wouldn't jump into that one again for the so-called prestige that I have yet to experience.

Susan might have been better able to cope with some of the organizational practices if she could have felt a stronger commitment to the cause. She described feeling ambivalent, at best, about that.

> I'm really hard-pressed to justify to myself about spending all this time in an organization to do with the arts when the world is not going to grind to a halt if this city does not have an arts organization . . . When you have been involved with kids, poverty, and the homeless, it is really hard to get excited about it - although I do get excited when I go to a function and I realize that I'm part of it, although I'm only one out of thirty board members.

At the time of the interviews, Susan planned on resigning after she completed her three-year commitment. This volunteer-based organization, which is often in the news, in part because of its financial problems, continues to employ practices that frustrate and alienate its volunteers. Susan's experience supports Harmen's (1982) contention that some volunteer organizations have contracted the same "pathologies" (p. 11), such as bureaucracy, that have infected government and the private sector for years.

John is strongly committed to a society based on principles of social justice and equality. He attempts to speak out on behalf of disadvantaged and powerless groups in society and sees his volunteer work with a fundraising organization as an opportunity to advocate on their behalf.

> . . . the nature of the fundraising club was that we would consider causes that had fallen through the cracks. There was no major national campaign for them and no government program for them . . . If nobody wanted to look at these people, then generally the organization did.

Club meetings, for John, were an opportunity to make a positive impact on the community. The organization raises money through various events and then the membership decides what groups should receive its support.

> I had some exposure [at club meetings] to housing projects for various individuals. I found those a tough one to turn down under any circumstances. I have a soft spot in my heart for those kinds of things. I couldn't stand the thought of someone sitting out in this part of the world with all this oil money and everything else without a place to sleep. [It doesn't matter] whether they were an alcoholic or been kicked out of their parents' home or what have you. I always found those causes worthy . . . volunteering should be a form of the better part of humanity coming out and saying, "I can't bear to see this happen to my fellow human being." Volunteering should be a part of the social conscience of society. I believe there will be an evolution to the point where we have a just and fair society. People [will be able] to walk without fear and they [will be able] to support themselves without needing to sell drugs or sell themselves.

John's vision often came into conflict with competing views within the organization. He felt frustrated and disappointed with the "middle class bias" and the "limited vision" of the other members as it related to volunteerism and a more socially just community.

> . . . it upset me that our club would not fund anything leaning towards social programs or social issues. They have a tough time with that . . . I was absolutely amazed to find that a large part of the service population doesn't give a hoot much about what happens outside their own neighbourhood. They don't give a hoot about people that they would never meet at a social function anyways . . . I would like to see a bigger percentage of funding going to help groups like the poor and the homeless. Others prefer to see help for the child from the divorced family who cannot afford to pay his hockey fees anymore - or getting a computer for a middle class boy who just broke his neck so that he can do his homework . . . those are easy projects to finance.

John was on leave from the fundraising club at the time of the interviews. I wondered whether he might not look for volunteer work that reflected more closely his values and ideals. I was puzzled by his apparent lack of interest in more direct political involvement. His plans included returning to the fundraising organization and, in time, reassuming different leadership roles. He enjoys fundrasing with the organization and has come to accept that he will not always get his own way and that he must respect the different views of other members. Further, he has had success circumventing club decisions by using his contacts in other service organizations to get funding for community groups that his volunteer organization wouldn't help.

Meeting People and Networking

An important benefit of volunteerism (Wilson, 1990) is the opportunity for satisfying social contact. Volunteers may meet other volunteers and staff in a particular organization as well as people in the community.

As described by the study's participants, volunteer activity provided a broad range of social contact. Sometimes the participants described this as enjoyable and rewarding while, at other times, they described different conflict situations.

Susan sees herself as a "very social person" and many of the people she has met through volunteerism have been "just fantastic." She tended to describe some volunteer work mainly in terms of the enjoyment associated with being with people. This, for example, was clearly the most important aspect of her volunteer job with a distress center.

Susan volunteered as a crisis counsellor and a "group leader" with the agency. She described the organization as divided into teams of volunteers and it was her responsibility as "group leader" to take her team's concerns to staff and board meetings. In the process, she acquired close friends and made a strong commitment to the volunteer group. While she described feeling empathy for the clients who were "interesting," it was clearly the congenial atmosphere and numerous social functions that made the volunteer job worthwhile.

> . . . we all went out for beer together. We would have meetings, and 50 percent of the volunteers would show up. It was very social and everybody knew everybody. It wasn't like when you went to work and you had to introduce yourself . . . We would have a movie and popcorn night and not do anything related to the distress line. We would use their room and a lot of the staff would come and we would have a really good time. We would have a picnic every summer and a baseball game and a Christmas party. The volunteers would do all the organizing. There were a lot of varying levels of involvement. That's what was so good about it - you could come and just answer the phone for four hours a week or you could go all the way.

Susan eventually left the organization because of a conflict with a paid staff. She said too much was being asked by staff of the volunteers in terms of their time. Interestingly, it was her job as "group leader" to represent the concerns of the volunteers, but she felt powerless to resist organizational change, and as a result resigned. Her experience supports Ilsley's (1990) finding that some volunteer organizations employ a workplace model that may exclude volunteers from organizational decision-making.

John described volunteer activity as partly the enjoyment of being "around the same people a lot." The social aspects are critically important because "that is what keeps the members coming back." He described various enjoyable social events but said one of the highlights of his volunteer work was winning the interclub bonspiel with the fundraising organization. As he put it, "98 percent of the

people were there for fun and 2 percent were there to win. We were there for fun and we won."

Emma initially felt "terrified" about meeting new people through volunteer activity. However, it has been meeting people "from many walks of life" that has provided her with the motivation to continue. She described the enjoyment of meeting immigrant students and other volunteers through her company's employee assistance program, but the focus of her social life has been self-help groups.

> . . . I would say [that] at least 95 percent of my socializing now is with [self-help] people, but I don't think of them as [self-help] people. I just think of them as friends who just happen to be in the [self-help] movement.

An important function of self-help groups (Evans, 1979) is to meet the social needs of their members and this would certainly appear to be Emma's experience.

While the literature focusses on volunteerism in terms of the supportive relationships it provides, the study's participants often described it in terms of conflict situations.

John, for instance, described meeting "lots of boneheads in volunteering." He defined a "bonehead" as a person who seemed incapable of being sensitive to the needs of others. Volunteer coordinators who made excessive demands on their volunteers were "boneheads."

> I have met my fair share of difficult people in volunteering. I guess the most difficult time was a situation where they [paid staff] wouldn't take "no" for an answer regarding volunteer hours. I said "no" because I didn't have the time to do it. They wouldn't take "no" for an answer, and they were really persistent . . . I ended up not doing any more volunteer work for that organization simply because I refused to be put into that situation.

Emma described numerous conflicts with paid staff and volunteer coordinators in different organizations. She saw some of these situations as abusive, and I will elaborate further on them in the section on "Abusing Volunteers."

She also described conflict with other members in self-help groups. While popular stereotypes probably depict these organizations as democratic and egalitarian, some members are regarded as, at best, nuisances, or, at worst, pariahs. Emma described "Little Ted" as a member with many years of sobriety who was chronically unemployed and often looking for handouts at meetings.

> "Little Ted" has been around the group for a long time. He's got a good story and knows how things work. He gets to know people [with the idea] of getting money from them. He did that to me and to other newcomers. These people don't know how things work. They tend to trust people who are in the group. They tend to think that everybody in the group is a good person.

Susan described board work as mainly conflict-based. Conflicts may arise between different members on a board, between the board and the paid staff, as well as between the board and the community. She described, for example, her work with nonprofit daycare boards as often involving conflict with conservative forces in the community. She saw some of these conflicts as important learning experiences.

> . . . we went [to city council] and had a good try. [This alderman's] basic attitude was "my daughter was a single parent and she didn't have to send her kid to subsidized for child are." There was just no point in meeting with him, but we did meet with people who could turn the tide, and for the moment, nonprofit daycare is still part of city funding . . . It was a real eye-opener to see how the other 95 percent of the population thinks about daycare. There are such rednecks out there!

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines a network as an "interconnected or interrelated chain, group, or system. As described by the study's participants, volunteerism involved the development of networks that were valuable in ways beyond the immediate social contact which they provided.

The participants saw their volunteer networks in terms of the emotional security they provided. John, for example, described his network as a "group of friends who care about how you do and you care about how they do." His network

was particularly valuable in providing him with the support he needed when he returned to university.

Emma saw one of the major benefits of self-help groups as the sense of security they provided. Self-help literature suggests that groups form a world-wide network in that members are morally responsible for helping one another.

> . . . if I decide to transfer to another city and I didn't know another person there, I would be perfectly okay. All that I would have to do is go to a [self-help] meeting. You can go to another country and go to a meeting and you instantly know a group of people. There is a connection with every alcoholic in every country that you are in. You are a recovering alcoholic and you need another one . . . I don't know of any organization where you get that from.

Volunteer networks were also described by the study's participants as effective information systems. Susan, for example, regularly learned about new volunteer opportunities through her contacts. John described the information that he received from his volunteer contacts as valuable when he returned to university.

> . . . a couple of friends who I met through my volunteering have been through the program that I am in now . . . They gave me advice on how to arrange my finances, who to talk to, what courses to take, [and] what I needed in terms of material and equipment.

Susan used her contacts to find a paid job. She had been working for a computer company and doing volunteer work at a volunteer referral agency in her spare time. When she decided to leave the company, she found the contacts she made in the volunteer community important in getting a job with the referral agency.

> . . . I never would have got this position in a volunteer organization without my past volunteer work. I would say that 90 percent of the people who work here were volunteers here at one time or another . . . I had to demonstrate my belief in volunteerism and get to know people. That is the whole name of the game - the whole philosophy around here.

When I interviewed John, he was about to graduate from university. He described volunteer activity, especially for people seeking professional careers, as having become "serious business" in recent years. "It is far more than deciding who you are going to be socializing with on a Thursday night." John saw the extensive references that he had acquired through volunteer activity as making the difference in finding a job in what he said were "tough economic times."

> I tell people that they can meet the people [whom] they will be working for [through volunteer work.]. [I tell people] that they can meet the people [who] they will be working with and the people who will be hiring them. If you can get to volunteer functions and allow

> people to get to know you - more importantly than you getting to know them - then the opportunities are a lot greater for you.

I talked with John about four months after he graduated, and although he still had not found a job in his chosen profession, he remained optimistic something would soon develop. He had contacted some administrators of personnel departments whom he had previously met through volunteerism at the university and in the community but had been informed that the organizations were downsizing and would not be hiring into the foreseeable future. I hope John finds his volunteer contacts helpful in finding a job. I believe his professional dedication would make him a valued employee.

On the other hand, I reflected on the situation of other graduates who, for one reason or another, choose not to volunteer and, as a result, may not have networks to assist them. How will they fare in a job search process that is described in the literature as increasingly informal (Stephan, 1990)? I also reflected on the statistics (Statistics Canada, 1987) that show volunteerism as a mainly middle class phenomenon and how this might further disadvantage already-marginalized unemployed people.

Finding Companions

While the study's participants described volunteer activity in terms of broad social contact, they also found it a particularly effective way to find close companions. Each of the interviewees met significant others through volunteerism in different settings.

John, for example, during his early volunteer work on campus, not only had an interesting volunteer job but also met his wife, who was a volunteer in the same organization. His desire to "meet girls" was a "prime motivator" in his initial decision to become a volunteer. He counts among his best friends today some of the other volunteers in the fundraising organization.

John sees volunteering as being qualitatively different than other social settings in terms of making friends. "In volunteering, you talk to other people about things other than what you do for a living." He described this aspect of volunteerism as invaluable when he has wanted to make new friends. While he might have felt reluctant contacting a work colleague over some issues, he described feeling comfortable talking to other volunteers over any concern.

> [Through volunteer work], I can make a few new friends and get to know people that I never knew before. I can have an excuse to phone people whether the matter is important or not. It might be trivial to me or it might be trivial to them, but in the process we get to know one another. When you look after some minor detail in the

> organization you get to rub shoulders with other people and [that] is a good way to make friends.

Emma told some humorous stories about her early experiences meeting men in self-help groups. She was looking for a husband and went to "many meetings because certain men would be there." Even though she never found a husband, the experience was beneficial in that "if it hadn't been for that, who knows if I would have stayed around."

Emma described different settings in which she has attempted to find close friends. The workplace was difficult because there "never seemed to be an opportunity to get to know people beyond a superficial level." She also worried because of the potential embarrassment of the failed office romance. Then, when she returned to university, she saw all the men as being too young for her. Self-help groups proved to be ideal in that they were good places in which to learn about other people.

> . . . in a self-help meeting you are talking about some pretty personal things. You are in a room in close contact [with other people] for an hour and you get to know something about them. I always used [that] as a lever to get to know them better . . . They [the men] might talk about vulnerable spots in themselves [and] I was a master manipulator in my early sobriety. I would pick up on something and use it in some sort of way. Meetings were where you got the longest and most intimate kind of contact to establish relationships. Plus, you go out for coffee afterwards and that is a great way [in which] to get to know people.

Susan made "one or two really good friends in every organization [in which] she has worked." Susan described herself as a "conservative" person because it was important to her that her friends share her values and attitudes. She said she might do volunteer work for a singles organization and meet people that way but would feel uncomfortable attending a singles club function. Volunteerism has provided her a safe environment in which to make friends because you can make assumptions about their backgrounds and values.

> . . . when you go through a volunteer training session with someone, you know things about them below the surface. [It's] not "hi" and "how are you" and "my wife's name is" and "I drive this kind of car" and "I do this for a living." It is "this is the way I feel about things." I think the connection between people [in volunteer work] is much stronger from the beginning . . . for example, I met one of my [now ex] boyfriends at a workshop that I went to one night. I sat right in front of him. Each of us presumed things about the other by virtue of the fact that we were at this volunteer training program and also that we were both volunteers with this organization. Nothing is said, but you just kind of know it. You have a different [starting point] than meeting "Joanne Smith" or "Joe Smith" whom you might meet at the "Sugar Bowl" [a local coffee shop].

Abusing Volunteers

While the literature generally sees volunteers as a valued resource, the study's participants described different situations where volunteers were abused.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary broadly defines "abuse" as the "harmful, injurious, or offensive" treatment of another person.

The participants in this study offered general comments about the nature and extent of volunteer abuse as well as specific examples of it. Sometimes the participants described situations in which other volunteers were abused, and at other times, they described situations in which they felt abused.

Susan sees volunteer abuse as being widespread in the volunteer community. Some organizations have gained a reputation for "treating their volunteers poorly," and further, some volunteers "refuse placements in these organizations." It is a common occurrence in volunteer organizations for volunteers to have completed a tedious job and the volunteer coordinator to be "too busy to even thank them." This stemmed, in part, from a "language of abuse" that Susan said was pervasive to some volunteer organizations.

> . . . we "use volunteers" to do this and we "use volunteers" to do that. Whenever I go to a volunteer meeting, I always say to people [volunteer coordinators] that we don't "use volunteers" - we utilize their knowledge and skills.

Susan felt abused by a paid staff in one particular organization. The volunteer job involved working with paid staff to help plan and conduct workshops for people who had recently assumed a volunteer board position.

> . . . we were going to do this workshop out of town. It was a fair drive. She [paid staff] wanted to do the starting. She wanted to do the ending. We had to leave at this time and stay in this hotel. She wanted to make all the decisions. She didn't ask me what kind of experience or training I had . . . she assumed that I was a nobody!

Susan felt that as an experienced volunteer, she had the right to negotiate the working conditions of her assignments. She refused to work under this staff person and described that decision as having a significant long-term positive impact on her life.

> . . . it was the first time in my life that I actually stood up and said "no" to someone. After that, it made it easier to say "no" in other areas of my life.

Susan experienced more systematic and far-ranging abuse from the arrogant" and self-centered" men on the board of the cultural organization. On one occasion, she received a letter from the president informing her that he had evaluated her volunteer work and that he was happy to inform her that he was extending her position for another year. Susan had nothing but contempt for the letter because, as she explained, she had already been accepted on the board for a three-year term. The president had no power to remove her even if he had wanted to because that would have required a general meeting of the board.

Another incident involved a letter from the vice president thanking her for chairing the "special events and casino committee." Susan had no input into that decision. "He didn't even have the courtesy to phone me and ask me if it would by okay." Further, she felt discriminated against by the general manager of the organization. She was often passed over when free tickets to particular events were given out to the volunteers.

> I don't have money and I don't live in [a prestigious neighbourhood] so he doesn't treat me as well as the president of a company . . . Sometimes I really wonder what I'm doing at those meetings.

Her overall sense of frustration and anger with this organization is aptly expressed in the following.

> . . . the real beef I have with them is the way they treat their people . . . they got it totally "ass backwards" as far as I'm concerned as to how you treat a volunteer. I feel for the time commitment, which is heavy, the treatment is kind of shoddy. They should be wooing me, and I shouldn't be wooing them.

Susan was discriminated against not only on the basis of gender but, also, socio-economic status. Her experience would support Baty's (1989) contention

that in volunteer work, women "tend to be the doers, while men are the managers" (p. 13).

Emma sees women as being vulnerable to being "taken advantage of" and "harassed" in self-help groups, because self-help groups indoctrinate members into being compliant to group demands.

> . . . in self-help groups you are taught from the very beginning to never say "no." Whatever they [more experienced members] ask of you, you never say "no." It comes with the territory that you owe [for your sobriety]. I certainly know women in their early sobriety who were hit on by guys with quite a bit of sobriety. I was camouflaged under "I'm going to help you, and "let's go for a cup of coffee," and the next thing you know they are trying to get them into bed. That still goes on a lot . . .

Emma has felt abused in self-help groups. These situations generally involved other people making decisions about what her responsibilities to the group should be.

> . . . someone phoned me and told me there was a woman who was new to the group who was looking for someone to do her Step Five with [personal confession]. This group of people had decided that it should be me. I have never done a Step Five with anyone and I have no intention of doing a Step Five with anyone. I just don't feel comfortable with that. I told this person that, and he said, "how can you say that" and "you should feel honoured that this group of people chose you." I felt very pressured [when] he started on the guilt stuff . . . [and] I thought that he was really taking advantage of

> me. They thought [that] I should do this and it was just a matter of where and when.

Emma had experiences in community volunteer organizations, especially the distress organization, that she regarded as abusive. She started the volunteer job mainly working evenings but, because of other demands on her time, decided to switch to the day shift when paid staff worked. The atmosphere during day shifts was "a little like in the office with the boss, and I was the worker." She felt powerless to voice her ideas because "I was just a volunteer and obviously the paid staff were more important." What brought things to a climax, however, was the obvious contradiction in this organization between the work performed and the economic status of the paid and volunteer staff.

> . . . the paid staff were sitting behind their desks to answer phones, but they weren't doing half the work the volunteers were doing. That is when I started wondering about what I was doing there. So to get over that I started working evening shifts again, but you can't wipe that feeling out. I felt used.

As I previously indicated, Emma left this organization immediately after her one-year commitment. She has reflected on that experience and suggested that "obviously, some types of volunteer jobs are simply getting people to work for nothing." It is pointing out the obvious to suggest that volunteers are attractive to

organizations because they are cheap and can probably be counted on to do the work the paid staff doesn't want to do. From a more critical perspective, all volunteer work may be seen as a form of economic abuse. If it is worth doing, it is worth being paid for.

John sees volunteer abuse as being "at least or perhaps even more blatant than [that of] paid workers in the workplace." He described different categories of volunteers and their vulnerability to being abused. His aunt, for example, belongs to the group of "willing volunteers." These volunteers have been conditioned from an early age to "please people," and further, "they don't have the word 'no' in their vocabulary."

> An aunt of mine has spent her lifetime in the committee room. She knows all the influential people in the provincial government. She does a lot or work - virtually all of her spare time is committee work. There is no financial reward or reward in terms of employment. Committee work is simply a volunteer thing. They were told that this is the right way to think and this is the right political party and they do their little bit and it becomes a big bit and pretty soon they are busy all time. The people who are getting all the credit for this work being done are our elected members [who are almost all men] but most of the people doing the work are women in committee rooms. I regard that as abusive.

Other volunteers are even more vulnerable because they need volunteer work for resumes or some educational requirement.. These volunteers are unlikely

to resist the unreasonable demands of volunteer coordinators and very often do the "grunt work" in a volunteer organization.

The increasingly-popular practice of court-ordered community service is likely to result, according to John, in highly-abusive situations for volunteers.

> A person may have a criminal charge, and they may be required to give community service for so many hours. A volunteer coordinator may decide for whatever reason that they are going to record only so many hours. So the person ends up working more and more. There are a thousand different ways that that kind of volunteer can be abused. If they don't perform to the volunteer coordinator's satisfaction, they are incarcerated. It is their very freedom that is at stake.

John's observations on court-ordered volunteer work as abusive treatment of volunteers is in marked contrast to the literature. Hanson (1985), in a discussion of the subject, sees it as an opportunity for personal growth and adult learning.

Learning through Volunteerism

As was described in previous sections, learning as described by the study's participants was pervasive to many volunteer contexts. This section focusses specifically on how the study's participants learned through volunteerism and provides further examples of what they learned.

Volunteer learning, as described by the study's participants, was accomplished in a combination of different ways. These included learning from an experience itself, through observing and listening to others, by independent investigation, as well as from critical reflection on a particular aspect of volunteerism.

The participants described some volunteer activity in terms of novel tasks or situations. These sometimes provided for the development of new skills through practice and reflection.

John described this learning as "learning by doing" and said that it had been an integral part of his volunteer activity since his 4-H days.

> Generally speaking, in volunteering you are put into a situation or you put yourself into a situation where you may not be skilled and you learn how to do things by doing them. You don't have to be afraid of something. You tackle something and go ahead and do it, and if you make a mistake, you don't do that again, and if you do it right, then there are rewards for that.

John learned a variety or organizational and communication skills through this process. His volunteer work with the fund-raising organization, for example, was a "crash course" on public speaking.

> I had to stand up and make speeches or answer questions from the floor. That was always difficult. You need approval from the floor about something that you feel strongly about. In order to do that, you have to present an argument in such a way that you gain acceptance on your issue . . . I learned to prepare my material, make some notes, be sure that I covered all the bases and not to focus so much time on what I was going to say as to how I was going to say it.

John has experienced numerous spinoff benefits as a result of acquiring public-speaking skills. For example, it has been especially valuable when he returned to university and needed to make class presentations.

Susan said that she is the type of learner who "could see bread being baked a thousand times but needed to actually do it to learn it." Susan learned an assortment of skills through working on boards and committees, including leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills. She learned, for example, the requisite skills to develop policy from an experience with the AIDS organization. She said that she had acquired training on the theoretical aspects of writing policy through attending workshops and teaching other volunteers, but it was only when she went to do it that it actually crystallized in her mind.

> It was a really interesting experience when I actually had to do it myself [writing a policy]. I had taught it a million times before and I knew all the basics. I could have stood up and told them [the board] in fifteen minutes how to write a clear and concise policy statement. It has to have this for an introduction, and it has to include these

> parts. But there I was, looking at this manual as if I had never taught or read about it before. I started thinking, "oh, that is what they mean" and "oh yeah, that is how it works." Then it had to go back to the board for discussion and everybody wanted changes in this word or that. There are seventeen people on the board. It took two years to get that policy written. It was when I went to do it - to actually write a policy for the AIDS organization that I learned how to do it.

Emma was "ill-equipped" to deal with other people when she first did service work. "My thing was always to have a few drinks before I talked to anybody." Through working with others, she learned over the years to "talk without drinking and to feel comfortable with people."

The participants acquired information and insights into a variety of topics through listening to and observing others. Sometimes this occurred in informal settings, such as having coffee with a friend or, on other occasions, the participants learned from others in structured settings such as meetings.

Emma acquired numerous insights into herself from her "sponsor" in the self-help group. She described a "sponsor" as a more-experienced member who served as a mentor by providing guidance and helpful hints on living sober. While she has had numerous sponsors, she sees Jan as not only a close friend but a person who has taught her much about living.

> . . . she was the one who pointed out one day that I was responsible. I was "bitching" about something in my life that wasn't quite right, and she asked me if I thought I was responsible for creating that situation. I thought about that for awhile, and it occurred to me that I was . . . I realized at that point that I had choices in my life, whereas before I didn't think that I had any choices.

Susan learned though observing others in the AIDS organization. Sometimes it was unplanned. She was attracted, on one occasion, to the dynamic leadership style of the executive director. In the process, she acquired insights into, but not skills related to, effective leadership and communication.

> I have watched that man in action, and it has been a phenomenal experience. I have never worked with anybody in a committee like that. He can get so many divergent opinions and work with them. He can make everybody feel like they have been heard. It is just amazing to watch. He can run a meeting and cut people off without offending them. You can read fifty books on how to conduct a meeting and never learn how to do that.

Susan attributed the manager's success to his "media background," which contributed to the "commanding presence in his tone of voice." She wanted to take voice lessons so that she could "command other people's attention," but eventually decided against it because she didn't feel that she could emulate him.

My impression was that Susan had not identified her own leadership strengths and that there are different leadership styles which may be more

effective than others in motivating volunteers. Some volunteers, no doubt, respond better to a more democratic leadership style and not the charismatic one as described by Susan.

The monthly "forums" at John's fundraising club were "informal education" about different causes in the community. The organization invites groups who request funding to speak to the membership about their causes. John learned about a variety of causes in the community; including the poor, homeless, alcoholics, battered women, as well as others. One forum in particular was informative in terms of the problems faced by some younger people in society.

> The Youth Emergency Shelter presentation really stands out in my mind. I could really identify with these young people who found for one reason or another that they cannot live at home. They literally fall through the cracks of society. It is really just a drastic plight for a young person to be in. Where do you go when you can't go home because "Daddy" climbs into bed with you or "Mum" swats the shit out of you with the rolling pin. This problem isn't isolated either - poor and wealthy families share in it . . .

The participants described acquiring information and knowledge through independent investigation. Sometimes the participants read books and other material related to their volunteerism, while at other times they independently sought out further information on a topic in other ways.

Emma, for example, has read most of the literature on addictions written by self-help groups and many of the popular books on personal growth available in bookstores. She has also attended many lectures and short courses, such as the ones offered by the Center for Self Awareness, on various aspects of personal development. "I needed to explore other sources of information and not just listen to people at meetings."

More recently, Emma has taken an interest in reading about the history of the self-help movement. She finds the subject "fascinating" and also helpful in terms of understanding the issues faced by particular self-help groups. In time she may read and reflect on some of the broader issues related to these organizations such as accessibility and discrimination.

Susan was helpful in terms of my literature search because she has read many popular books in the volunteer field. She also attended numerous conferences as a volunteer and learned about different aspects of volunteer organizations.

Further, she has read about and reflected on other topics related to particular volunteer jobs. For example, she read a book written by a social service committee. It was interesting because it "bites the hand that feeds them." The volunteer organization is funded by the government but, at the same time, is often critical of government social policy.

> I read this book that they [social service organization] put out. The biggest issue fifty years ago was food for the hungry people during the depression. And today, it still is a big issue. We have food banks, and we still have hungry people. That was sad and disconcerting.

On another occasion, she "tackled" a book on the AIDS problem. It was recommended to her by other volunteers in the organization. She wanted to learn more about the subject so she could be more conversant at board meetings.

> I knew absolutely nothing about AIDS except what I learned from some gay friends and a little from the media. Then I started to read this book [entitled] Then the Band Played On. It is about the doctors who put the AIDS puzzle in place and figured out how it was transmitted. It is very heavy reading, but I have learned a lot about the problem.

John conducted various fact-finding missions to other volunteer organizations in the community. This provided him with not only opportunities to network, but knowledge of the problems and issues faced by particular volunteer organizations.

> The one thing that I found is that almost every organization is going to have a different structure. There is very little cohesiveness from one organization to another in terms of philosophy or purpose. Most organizations typically have poor record-keeping unless they are very large. Most organizations have very little formal training for volunteers. I found that it is typical of volunteer organizations that

> only one in four leaders is interested in balancing the books, and if the leader isn't interested in it, it is difficult to convince the treasurer to balance the books because he is a volunteer as well.

John also sought out information on the many applications for funding that came before his service organization. On one occasion, he journeyed to the university to talk with medical researchers on their different projects. He reflected on the knowledge he acquired about the relationship between government, medical research, and the volunteer community.

> I found out things about medical research projects. In some cases they [the researchers] have proof for a large part of their work, but they are unable to get even lottery money from the provincial government. This money is needed for clinical trials, and that is where you take a procedure that is successful and you try it on human beings. The funding for this is remarkably small, but it is quite large for a small service organization. One of the things [that] I have learned is that we are very near a cure for diabetes in terms of a transplant right here at this university, but there is no money to pay for it - to lock this thing up. All that money has to be raised through volunteer organizations.

While there are numerous definitions of critical thinking, Brookfield [1984] defines it simply as "imagining different ways it could be" (p.11). He says that it can vary from one context to another. While I have previously indicated numerous

situations where the study's participants critically reflected on their volunteerism, in this part I provide further examples.

Emma critically reflected on the different impacts of volunteer activity on her personal growth. For example, while she valued her formal education, she saw the learning from volunteer activity as having a more profound impact on her life.

> I think before I started in a self-help group and did other [stuff] in the community, I was really closed-minded. I though I had all the answers [but] the more I learn, the more I realize [that] I don't have all the answers. I have become more open to listening to other people and seeing another side to something. I realize how badly I treated some people . . . these groups [self-help groups] have changed the people who I want to associate with. The important thing is that I felt the changes and didn't just intellectualize the changes. The most important thing to come out of the four years that I spent at university was [that] I am now able to enjoy the *Globe and Mail* once a week.].

Susan reflected on the different types of knowledge she has acquired. She described the learning she acquired through volunteer activity, especially in self-help groups, as "self-centered" learning, while the education she received from the university was "head learning." She hoped that the two could be "blended" so that the world might be a better place. It is difficult to assess such ideas except to suggest that historically, social change through personal change has not been particularly successful. This approach to social change ignores the political

realities of powerful groups, who may have a vested interest in maintaining a status quo.

Susan reflected on aspects of different volunteer organizations in which she has worked. She critically evaluated, for example, the objectives of the AIDS organization which she said were "constantly revisited" at board meetings.

> . . . we still have gay men on the board who feel that 100 percent - not 100 percent but 87 percent - of our education should be targeted towards gay men. They figure that 87 percent of the people who contract AIDS are gay men, so our education should reflect that. I thank that's great, but at the same time, we have to provide for the future. And we are a community-funded organization. I advocate that it really should be a broad-based organization in the community. Anybody can get AIDS - not just gay people.

Susan reflected on the dynamics of other volunteer organizations. She had the opportunity to do corporate volunteering and has thought about some of the negative impacts of those organizations.

> I was heading up this [corporate volunteer] project that had about sixty people in it. It had all the dynamics of the workplace. If something went wrong, it would have really affected my career with the company. All the other volunteers were the managers, and I was very aware of that. If I snapped and said to someone, "no - now just go and sit down and do your work and don't bug me," it would have probably got me fired. In normal volunteering, you can just walk away, and it is not going to go any further.

Susan concluded that volunteer work in the corporate sector not only brings more pressure to bear on volunteers, but companies generally have "no sense of their responsibility in the big pictures." It is reasonable to suggest that companies become involved in volunteerism because they believe it will ultimately result in increased profits and not because of any deeply-held commitment to a cause in the community.

As John puts it, "I have done quite a lot of thinking about volunteering." His thinking has often focussed on the broader political context in which volunteer organizations function. He sees a major reason for concern with the apparent increased demand for service volunteers.

> I see the service sector picking up where the government left off. The government is not able to care for its people and [they] are less and less willing to be even concerned about those things. I learned that from a reflection on a society where your poor and castoffs are literally disposed of on a landfill site if they don't wake up in time . . . I'm not so sure that government doesn't belong in public welfare to ensure that each individual is cared for and has a place to sleep. I don't believe a volunteer board should determine whether this person is worthy or not with something as vital as food, clothing, health care, or shelter. These should not be discretionary. The extras - that's fine - let the volunteers look after those - they probably do a better job anyways.

As governments reduce spending on education, social services, and health care, according to John, many providers of these services rely on various types of

fundraising activities. The biggest of these are bingos. While many people probably see bingos as, at worst, mindless forms of recreation, John described a different perspective on these from doing "countless bingos" over the years.

> . . . it is rote and it is mundane and it fits perfectly the Skinnerian random reinforcement model. It trains people through a system of random reinforcements to put their money down - to block dots. And these people at bingos are not people who are wealthy and dressed in tuxes or have a $10,000 watch on one arm and a $2,000 girl on the other. The rule is the poor decrepit lady who has holes in her sweater and her shoes are just about to fall off of her feet. She has runs in her pantyhose, and she obviously cannot afford to be putting her money on the table. Many of these people are there six nights a week . . . I really struggle with that part of it.

John said that the money raised by volunteer organizations through gambling is a "voluntary tax on the people who can least afford it." Although he maintains that the good from volunteer activity outweighs the bad by "a factor of ten to one," he sometimes reflected on whether some volunteer organizations contribute to further social inequality rather than a more just society.

> Very little of the revenue from gaming goes back to the very poor. Often what happens is this money is spent on children and adults who really don't need it. Nobody is going to live or die because there isn't an additional $500 or $1,000 for the football team. I'm not trying to be critical of any particular organization, because they all do it - bowling clubs, skating associations, minor baseball, boy scouts, sexual assault centers - they all raise money at bingos. [And] then

> you have people [volunteers] appointed mainly by socio-economic status making the decisions on where this money is going to be spent. The other side of it is that you have some good people in volunteer work and volunteering provides learning and other benefits for the volunteers.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the themes which emerged from the interview data. These included: "Finding and Losing Commitment," "Meeting People and Networking," "Finding Companions," "Abusing Volunteers," and "Learning through Volunteerism."

In the next chapter, I provide my reflections on the research process and the study's findings.

CHAPTER V

Reflections

In this chapter I discuss my thoughts about the research process and findings as they evolved and became an integral part of my life over a two-year period. This chapter draws on my journal material, my memory of the research process, and the study's findings. The chapter is organized around the following topics: "On Problem Identification," "On Narrowing the Research Focus," "On Problem Significance," "On Reviewing the Literature," "On Choosing a Research Approach," "On Interviewing," "On Data Analysis," and "Reflections on the Findings and Recommendations for Future Research."

On Problem Identification

Finding a general area of interest was not a difficult task. I knew from the outset that the study would involve some aspect of volunteerism. My interest stemmed from my own experience as a volunteer in different settings over a number of years.

I have participated in self-help groups and, as a result, have acquired insights into these organizations, as well as myself. I have volunteered in service and educational organizations and have learned about some of the issues faced

by particular disadvantaged groups. I have done advocacy work with an inner city agency which attempted to help the poor and homeless. That volunteer work was a "conscious raising" experience for me in that for the first time I became aware of political forces that impact on marginalized groups in society. Overall, volunteerism has provided me with some personal satisfaction and new perspectives on myself, others, and society. I wanted to learn more about volunteerism.

On Narrowing the Research Focus

While finding a broad area of interest proved to be easy, focussing on a specific research topic was more difficult, evolving over several months and involving two different research proposals.

My first research proposal stemmed from a course in adult literacy that I had taken as part of my master's program in adult education. I was alerted to the important historical and contemporary role played by volunteers in the adult education field. My research proposal involved exploring the experiences of staff and volunteer literacy workers in an inner city literacy program. I was especially interested in adult education theories that see literacy as a force for social change and how these might translate into practice in a community literacy program.

While my research proposal generated enthusiastic support in my research class at the university, it was met with a lukewarm response from the staff of the

literacy program. I learned that many aspiring researchers had made different aspects of this program the focus of their research endeavours, and the staff had become suspicious of their intentions. As the program manager put it, "researchers often take more than they give," and as another staff summed it up, "literacy has been researched to death." I decided that, as a novice researcher, I needed enthusiastic support for my research project, and as a result, I decided against doing research connected to this literacy program.

I continued reading in the volunteer literature and made contacts with influential people in Edmonton's volunteer community. I had informal discussions during this period with staff at the Grant McEwan College Voluntary Sector Management Program, as well as some of the staff and volunteers in a local volunteer referral agency. These contacts offered me a broad perspective on volunteerism, crossing over the boundaries of particular organizations.

My new research proposal involved an exploration of volunteerism as it was perceived by experienced and active volunteers. I was interested in what personal meanings volunteers attached to their experiences. It was my hope that common patterns would emerge that would provide some insights into volunteerism.

In an attempt to clarify my thoughts about my own experiences, I wrote my volunteer autobiography. I looked for themes that linked my different experiences together. I reflected on what I learned, who I met, what I did, and what I liked and

disliked about volunteerism. This process was helpful in that it allowed me to distance myself from my experiences and helped me identify some personal biases that I had developed about different volunteer organizations.

In retrospect, it would have simplified the research process if I had focussed on volunteer activity in a particular context. This would have made comparison of data and identification of emergent themes a simpler task. In addition, it would have simplified the narrative writing in that I would not have had to describe multiple contexts. On the other hand, I viewed the research as exploratory. I wanted to identify themes related to volunteer activity across settings. However, context proved to be a significant factor in shaping the experience of individual participants.

On Problem Significance

During my informal conversations with the participants, some aspects of the study's significance became apparent. As I have indicated, my guess based upon my experience and the literature review was that there was little knowledge about volunteerism from the perspective of volunteers. The participants in this study confirmed this belief of mine.

One participant remarked that she found it "interesting" and "enjoyable" to be able to talk about her experiences. Another participant commented that being

interviewed was a "refreshing experience" and that the interviews "really affected" her. She described adopting a new perspective on volunteer work in that she was going to approach it without "any expectation of the way things should be," but at the same time, she wasn't going to be a "doormat" either. I believe that the participants found the interviews a useful learning tool in that they reflected on their experiences.

Another aspect of the research project's significance was the research agenda that I will discuss more fully at the end of this chapter. The participants directly or indirectly identified many of the topics that I identify as needing further exploration.

On Reviewing the Literature

Reviewing the literature proved to be an interesting although, at times, tedious task. It began with my identification of an area of interest and initially focussed on the volunteer literature but eventually expanded to include the adult education literature related to volunteer learning. Throughout the literature review, I looked for writings that related directly to the research questions that I identified in Chapter I.

I read several books and collected and read and re-read several binders full of material related to volunteerism. In addition, I found a handful of conceptual and

research-based articles in the adult education literature related to volunteer learning. I never felt comfortable, however, stopping the literature search because I believed that some research study lay just beyond my grasp. In the end, I think I found what was pertinent to this study.

The central feature of the literature in terms of my study was its gaps rather than an existing knowledge base related to my research question. Although some knowledge existed that related to volunteer learning, much of the literature is program specific and technical in nature. I developed the sense that in reading one book or article in the volunteer field, I was reading them all. Writers in this field never cease in pointing out the benefits to the organization and the individual volunteer of sound recruitment and training techniques. I concluded that the volunteer literature had much to say about how the volunteer experience should be but little about how it actually is.

I attempted to extrapolate from this literature what volunteer activity might mean from a management perspective. This literature provided some powerful images of volunteers. One of the first books I read was entitled A Practical Guide to the Care and Feeding of Volunteers (Thero, 1989). This book described volunteers as if they were young children in need of support and constant supervision. Other metaphors in the literature depicted volunteers as soldiers or raw material awaiting transformation into useful products. I reflected on the quality

of the volunteer experience in organizations which consciously or unconsciously adopted such metaphors.

In the end, it was significant that I found only one article written by volunteers (Moore & Westell, 1989). In a discussion on their work as literacy volunteers, they said they "rarely got a chance to reflect on issues of concern to us" (p. 319). These "voices" provided me with the incentive to describe the experiences of other volunteers. It was exciting to think that I was sailing into uncharted waters in that virtually no literature existed which described what volunteers thought about their experiences.

On Choosing a Research Approach

The purpose of the study was to understand volunteerism from the perspective of volunteers. To that end, a qualitative/interpretive approach was appropriate.

I learned about this research paradigm in my adult education research course, and I preferred it to quantitative approaches involving statistical analysis of human behaviour. Numbers, graphs, and equations have never told me "why" people behave as they do. People's accounts of their lives have always been more meaningful to me than any statistical abstractions of those experiences.

I was also attracted to the data collection techniques of qualitative research. I learned about interviews in my research class and this approach seemed to fit naturally with my propensity to talk and listen to others with the idea of learning about them. I felt a mixture of excitement and apprehension at the prospect of attempting to understand volunteering from the perspective of the interviewees.

On Interviews

The data-gathering process proved to be challenging and, after the initial interviews, the most enjoyable aspect of the research project. I looked forward to the interviews and the numerous informal get-tcgethers that I had with each participant. I had far-ranging discussions with the participants about their personal aspirations as well as their opinions on a range of political issues. I was able to establish a good rapport with the participants and this was consistent with my research approach in that I was able to understand volunteerism in the context of each participant's life.

Conducting multiple interviews with each participant had advantages. It allowed me to feel more "a part of the action." I had the opportunity to follow through with individual participants their reactions to events as they evolved. For example, I discussed with one participant her reaction to the ongoing demands of a particular volunteer organization. I had discussions with another interviewee

before and after her participation in a training program. I gained a sense of continuity and immediacy in data collection by conducting multiple interviews.

It was difficult, however, getting started with the data collection. It would have been helpful if I had the opportunity to practice my interviewing skills in my research course. I found interviews different from the informal get-togethers that I have had with people in which I learned about them. I sometimes felt awkward and preoccupied with covering my own self-perceived agenda during an interview. During the initial interviews, I sometimes asked questions of the participants that had already been answered. Listening to some of these interviews proved to be humorous.

I initially found the use of a tape recorder unnerving. Further, at least one participant was sensitive to its use. During one interview I forgot to disengage the pause button on the machine and learned to my embarrassment twenty minutes into the interview that nothing had been recorded.

I also attempted to keep detailed journal notes on my informal meetings with each participant. However, this was a task that I never entirely mastered. To compound the problem, I discovered that I had lost my notes of the meetings with one participant. I attempted to reconstruct those meetings as best I could from my recollection of them. After a slow and somewhat tentative start, the data-gathering process became the most enjoyable aspect of the research process.

On Data Analysis

The initial data analysis, like the data gathering, was an invigorating experience. As I have already indicated, I made a point of listening to each tape three or four times before I began transcribing it. I found this technique helpful in that I gained an overall sense of the interview and began identifying key ideas.

Transcribing the interviews was a tedious task, and if I were to do it again, I would consider paying someone to have this job done professionally. There was also the problem of wear and tear on the machine, and I "consumed" one tape recorder in the process. On the other hand, there was an advantage in doing the work myself in that it gave me further opportunity to familiarize myself with the data. My data base grew as the interviews progressed. In the end, I was faced with nearly 500 pages of data, and I felt overwhelmed by the task of making sense of it.

It was also at this time that my leave of absence ended, and I found myself trying to juggle the demands of being a full-time teacher with those of being a part-time novice researcher. My motivation to do that data analysis faded and, at times, was nonexistent. To compound the problem, I also felt increasingly isolated from the university community that for the previous two years had been my home. There should be a mechanism available for part-time graduate students who have completed their course work to network with other students. I believe that this

would help graduate students complete their programs. On the advice of my advisor and friends, I adopted a philosophy of "chipping away" at the data analysis. This proved to be successful but was painfully slow.

I experimented with a variety of data analysis techniques that were suggested in the research literature. This literature was helpful in terms of providing me with broad suggestions on how to do qualitative analysis but thin on actual procedures that might be used. In retrospect, I adopted what Miles (1984) calls the "art and stress intuitive approach" (p. 22). This involved an eclectic approach of organizing some data chronologically, identifying emergent themes, and situating other data into typologies from the literature.

I viewed writing the research narrative as an integral part of the data analysis. Rather than attempting to write the report from beginning to end, I decided to begin with the findings of the study, proceed to the description of the research approach and literature review, and complete the introduction and reflections as the final phase of the writing process. I wanted to write an informative and integrated narrative describing volunteerism. My reason for including extensive quotations from the data was to convey the sense that volunteerism is a lived experience.

I never felt totally satisfied with the narrative in that it sounded bulky, mechanistic, and monotonous when I read it. On the other hand, other people

who read it found it interesting and could identify with the experiences of the participants. Again, it would have been helpful to have had more exposure to reading and writing narratives in my research course before I began the research project.

Reflections on the Findings/Recommendations for Future Research

As the research project progressed, I reflected on the themes that were emerging from the data. In the following discussion, I will present my thoughts on the research findings in the context of the literature, and participant and researcher "voices." I also make suggestions for future research topics.

Volunteer Careers

The literature presents volunteerism as an adult activity. As described by two of this study's participants, it is a lifetime avocation. These interviewees described volunteer activity as something that they have done for nearly as long as they could remember. Further, these participants believed that they were strongly influenced as children by the volunteer activities of family and peers. Their experiences appear to support a "socialization model" (Moore, 1985) of volunteering.

All of the participants identified coercion as a key aspect of their early experiences. They used such phrases as "pleasing adults," "dysfunctional

families," "sibling rivalries," and "it wasn't my idea" to describe some of their early experiences. One participant sees all her community-related activities when she was younger as nonvoluntary. As she put it, "my parents made me do it."

There is little knowledge about the volunteer activity of children and adolescents. These groups appear to be especially vulnerable to being coerced and abused. Future research on volunteer activity should take these groups into consideration. The following is suggested as a research topic.

1. What types of volunteering do children and adolescents do? What motivates them? To what extent and in what ways are these volunteers coerced? In what other ways can this volunteerism be considered abusive? What should be done to resolve these problems?

Finding and Losing Commitment

The literature emphasizes volunteer activity that reflects deep commitment. Ilsley, in his book Enhancing the Volunteer Experience (1990), for example, elaborates on the subject by pointing out that commitment often involves great personal sacrifice. He states that some volunteers are so committed that "they are willing to sacrifice almost everything in their lives - even life itself - for what they believe in" (p. 50).

The commitments described by this study's participants were much more varied. While it was clear that some commitments were strongly felt, it was also

evident that others were transitory and relatively unimportant. It appears from this study that volunteer activity that engendered strong commitment was the exception and not the norm. The participants often described a diminishing sense of commitment and, as a result, left a particular volunteer organization. The participants' commitments were influenced by their perceptions of a volunteer cause, their interest in a particular volunteer job, and their realizations of different benefits.

There is a need for further research in these following areas related to volunteer commitment.

1. Study the intensity and durability of commitment in particular volunteer groups and volunteer settings. What factors appear to influence commitment?

2. Study other volunteers, such as Susan, who are "super committed" - over 1,000 hours a year. What type of volunteer work do they do and what sacrifices do they make?

Meeting People and Networking

According to the literature, volunteer activity has intrinsic social rewards. This idea is confirmed by this study. It was apparent that the volunteers enjoyed the social contact and recreation that volunteer activity provided them. It would not be an overstatement to say that for these participants, volunteerism in some settings provided the central focus for their social activities.

The literature suggests that volunteers may develop networks that are beneficial. Volunteer networks may be used to make contacts and acquire information about the job market and educational opportunities as well as resume building. As described by the study's participants, networks were valuable in a broad range of ways. The acquired emotional security as well as contacts and information about other volunteer jobs, paid jobs, and educational opportunities.

Further research involving larger samples needs to be done documenting the nature of volunteer networks. The following is suggested as a research topic.

1. Study the extent to which people are motivated to volunteer hoping to acquire information and contacts about jobs and other types of placements. To what extent are contacts made through volunteerism actually helpful to volunteers in finding different placements?

Finding Companions

The literature suggests that finding companions may be an important aspect of socializing with other volunteers and staff. As described by the study's participants, this was an important part of volunteerism. Each of the interviewees described volunteer organizations as a qualitatively different place to find close companions than other social settings. Could volunteer organizations become the new singles' organizations of the 1990s?

It would be interesting to know more about the experience of other volunteers. This type of information may be especially useful to volunteer managers in terms of mounting more effective recruitment campaigns. The following is suggested as a research topic.

1. Study the links between volunteer activity and finding close companions. Is this an important reason for people to volunteer? Are there discernable differences between volunteer groups (e.g. young people, older people) in this area? What factors and dynamics in society might explain this phenomenon?

Abusing Volunteers

There was little in the literature or my own experience that alerted me to this category. As described by the study's participants, the abuse and exploitation of volunteers is a common occurrence in different volunteer organizations. The participants described unreasonable expectations of volunteers as well as situations where volunteers were excluded from decision-making which directly affected them. It was apparent that the participants were sometimes discriminated against because they were unpaid workers and also because of gender and socio-economic background. These findings were especially interesting because the literature is virtually unending in its praise of the volunteer experience. The study, however, suggests that a volunteer "bill of rights" might be an appropriate strategy to adopt to protect volunteers from abusive and discriminatory practices.

This is a key issue, as two participants pointed out, for the voluntary nonprofit sector. If volunteer organizations acquire a reputation for abuse and discrimination, volunteer recruitment would be strongly affected. The following suggestions are made for research topics.

1. Study the language used by volunteer managers and in different volunteer organizations. How are volunteers described through this language? Does this language reflect particular attitudes towards volunteers?

2. Do a comparative study involving the perceptions of volunteers, volunteer managers, and paid staff related to the issue of volunteer abuse. How do different groups define volunteer abuse?

3. Do a survey study of the extent of volunteer abuse. Are particular types of volunteers (e.g. court-ordered volunteers, volunteers who need experience in order to meet a particular requirement), as suggested by one of the participants, more vulnerable to abusive treatment?

4. Do a critical analysis of the use of volunteers in different "nonprofit" organizations (e.g. the Dinosaur Exhibition). How are these volunteers recruited and what are their expectations? Can this type of volunteering be considered exploitive?

5. Do a critical analysis of the volunteer work done by women. What types of volunteer jobs do women do? In what ways are women discriminated against in

volunteer organizations? Is there any evidence that suggests women are assuming more responsible positions in volunteer organizations, while men are taking on more service volunteering?

Learning through Volunteerism

The literature suggests that learning is an important aspect of volunteerism. This research study supports the idea. Individual participants identified learning needs, and volunteerism provided different ways of meeting those needs.

Volunteer learning, as described by the study's participants, was valuable because it was connected to everyday living. As one participant described it, volunteer learning was more than "just head learning" in that it impacted every aspect of her personality and relations with others. The participants acquired new skills which they found beneficial in different ways. Further, they gained insights into themselves, their volunteer organizations, and the broader political context. According to this study, learning is an intrinsic element of volunteerism.

While this study's participants acquired a range of knowledge, attitudes, and skills, generalizations cannot be made about other volunteers. More research is needed to document not only the quantity but, more importantly, the quality and benefits of volunteer learning. The following research topics are suggested.

1. Can job-related skill development through volunteering be documented, particularly in terms of retraining of unemployed people, resulting in new employment?

2. Do further studies documenting the amount and quality of learning done by volunteers in different volunteer organizations.

3. Do a critical study of the "world view" of volunteers in different types of organizations. To what extent is a "world view" a necessary prerequisite for different types of volunteerism? How do these evolve? How realistic are the "world views" of different organizations?

Summary

Research on volunteer activity has typically focussed on the organizational context in which it takes place. In this study, I attempted to broaden the knowledge on volunteerism by changing the research focus to include the perspective of individual volunteers who participate in a variety of settings.

In Chapter I, I set the stage for the research project. I described my hunch based on personal experience that little was known about volunteer activity from the perspective of volunteers. In Chapter II, I reviewed the volunteer literature. While this literature is substantial, little of it related to my research focus. In Chapter III, I described my research methodology and introduced the three

participants in this study. I presented a description of the findings in Chapter IV. The themes that emerged from this study were "Finding and Losing Commitment," "Meeting People and Networking," "Finding Companions," "Abusing Volunteers," and "Learning through Volunteerism." These themes reflect the personal meanings of volunteerism for the study's participants.

In the first part of Chapter V, I provided my reflections on the research process as it unfolded. These included my thoughts on the satisfactions and problems I experienced as a novice researcher. I included some recommendations that might prove helpful to future novice researchers.

In the latter part of this chapter, I presented my reflections on the study's findings. While these participants may not have been prepared to sacrifice their lives for their volunteer work, they saw it as important and, at times, having a highly-beneficial impact on their lives. On the other hand, their experiences de-mythologize the volunteer experience in our society. The participants experienced abusive treatment and often found particular volunteer jobs less attractive than they expected. Nevertheless, on balance, they felt positive and looked forward to new challenges and the opportunity for new social contact and learning.

It seems appropriate to leave the last word on volunteering to Emma, Susan, and John.

Volunteer work has been being a better human being and striving to be a better human being - respecting other people and thinking about other people and getting out of my self-centredness (Emma).

It is that experience of being really involved and connected . . . That is what volunteering means to me - being fully engaged in the world (Susan).

If you feel a need to spend one night a week with the boys, for example, rather than going to the pub on Thursday night and watching the game - it would certainly be more constructive to spend one night a week at the club with the boys doing some constructive endeavour - raising some money, arguing about who is going to get it, and seeing that some need in the community that wouldn't have been met otherwise is met. It is certainly more socially acceptable and certainly more constructive. It is better for society and better for you (John).

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATION SHEET

Information Sheet

1. Name _____

2. Age _____

3. Phone No. (Home) _____ (Other) _____

4. Brief Educational Background

_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Brief Job/Career History

_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Future Education Plans

_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Job/Career Aspirations

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

Researcher: Bob Hyndman, B.A., B. Ed.
Master's Student
Department of ACT Education (U of A)

Advisory: Dr. Beth Young
Professor, Department of Educational
Administration (U of A)

I hereby agree to participate in this research project which examines the experiences and learning done by people through participation in voluntary organizations. The source of primary data for this study is volunteer history interviews which will document the experiences and learning of some volunteers.

I understand that I am free to ask questions about the research and to expect them to be answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that my name will not be disclosed at any time and that the information I provide will be used in such a way as to protect my identity.

I agree that interviews with me may be tape-recorded and that comments I make may be reported verbatim.

I understand that I may review and/or retain a copy of each interview tape, if I wish to do so.

I am aware that when Bob Hyndman is doing the analysis and interpretation of the data, he may consult with me from time to time.

Finally, I understand that I am free to refuse to answer specific questions or to disclose specific information, and I understand that I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

_____ Date
Signature of Participant

_____
Signature of Researcher

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS

Examples of questions asked during the first and second round of interviews included the following:

1. Can you take me through a brief history of your volunteering?

2. What motivated you to become a volunteer? Has that changed over time?

3. What are some of the benefits that you have gained from volunteering?

4. What are some of the main things that you have learned through your volunteering?

5. What volunteering most stands out in your mind as an enjoyable/satisfying/ rewarding experience?

6. What volunteering stands out in your mind as the least enjoyable/satisfying/ rewarding experience?

7. What sorts of things do you have to say about volunteering in general?